THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG

~HANDBOOK~

INTRODUCTION

Bernese Mountain Dogs are workings dogs with a long history as farmer's companions and herdsmen's helpers in their homeland, the Swiss Canton of Bern. Striking and dignified in appearance, they are strong, active, and sturdy dogs. Their coat is shining black, medium-length, and slightly wavy or straight. The black coat is set off by characteristic markings — white blaze and muzzle, chest, feet, and tail tip, and rich rust "eyebrows," cheeks, and bands between black and white on the legs.

The Bernese Mountain Dog is a heavy dog, thick bodied and with strong, stocky legs. Males are distinctly more massive than females ranging between 25 and 27 1/2 inches high at the withers, with adult weight usually between 90 and 120 pounds. Females are between 23 and 26 inches in height and weigh between 80 and 105 pounds.

Appearance is important in a working dog, but beauty is vain unless associated with excellence of character. Here too, the Bernese Mountain Dog is striking. Its gentle, quiet nature wins fast friends. It is devoted to its people and an excellent companion. It is readily

trainable, as would be expected of working farm dogs. Bernese Mountain Dogs do well in regular obedience work, show a real aptitude for tracking, and are excellent cart dogs. They are good watch dogs. Children and Bernese mix readily, as long as the children learn to treat them with respect and kindness. Consistent with their background as farm dogs, Bernese Mountain Dogs typically get along well with other animals.

The long heritage of Bernese Mountain Dogs as working farm companions is reflected in their good dispositions, steadfast devotion to their people, and readiness to learn. Human company is very important to them, and they are not pack or kennel dogs.

THE HISTORY OF BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOGS IN SWITZERLAND

As is true for many modern purebred dogs, especially farm dogs, the early history of the Bernese Mountain Dog is clouded in obscurity. Until pure breeding started, which in the case of this breed occurred around the end of the 19th century, utility ruled in breeding dogs. Farmers wanted dogs that were functional. Apparently modern Bernese Mountain Dogs stem from all purpose farmer's dogs that were versatile, serving as watchdogs around the farm, as well as cattle drovers, draft dogs, and companions for the alpine herdsmen.

Toward the end of the 19th century, when many Swiss dog fanciers were importing foreign breeds, a few fanciers dedicated themselves to preserving and promoting the Swiss farm dogs variously known as farmer's dogs, cheese factory dogs, Gelbbäckler (*"Yellow Cheeks"*) or Vieräugler (*"Four Eyes," in* reference to the rust-brown spots over the eyes). Notable among these fanciers was Franz Schertenleib of Burgdorf, near Bern, who in 1892 sought out this type of dog. In the Dürrbach region south of Bern, he found a dog that old timers recognized as a Gelbbäckler. A short time later, he and Professor Albert Heim, a well known geologist and dog fancier, found other dogs of this kind in the Dürrbach region as well as in other remote areas of the Canton of Bern. The first exhibition for these dogs, named Dürrbächlers, came in 1904. Several of these dogs were registered by the Swiss Kennel Club in 1905. In 1908 the name of the breed was changed to Berner Sennenhund, in recognition of the fact that the breed really originated in the entire Canton, not just in the Dürrbach region. A Senn or Senner is an Alpine herdsman, so a literal transla-

tion of this name is "Bernese Alpine Herdsman's Dog." The Schweizerische Klub für Berner Sennenhunde was established to protect and promote the breed.

Today the Berner Sennenhund is one of the best known and loved breeds in Switzerland. Closely associated with it are three other breeds of Sennenhund, the Grosse Schweizer Sennenhund, the Appenzeller Sennenhund, and the Entlebucher Sennenhund. These were also originally farm dogs, and while they share the black,white and rust color with the Berner, the three other Sennenhunde have short, smooth coats.

THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG IN AMERICA

The question of when the first Bernese Mountain Dogs came to America may never be answered precisely. Surely, Swiss farmers immigrating into the New World brought with them their valuable dogs for help around the farm. So far as solid facts are concerned, however, we know only that in January, 1926, the farmer Isaac Schiess of Florence, Kansas, imported a pair of Berner Sennenhunde from Switzerland. Mr. Schiess made every effort to register this pair with the American Kennel Club (AKC) but was unsuccessful in his efforts. Later in 1926, his pair produced a litter, but again the AKC refused to register them. Mr. Schiess, little daunted, registered them instead with the Swiss Kennel Club under the kennel name of *"The Clover Leaf."*

About ten years later, a second attempt to gain AKC recognition for the breed met with more success. In 1936, Glen L. Shadow of Ruston, Louisiana, imported another pair from Switzerland. Mr. Shadow's enthusiasm for the breed and his work on its behalf were vital to the recognition of these dogs by the American Kennel Club. Finally, on Tuesday, April 13, 1937, the AKC Board of Directors decided to recognize the Bernese Mountain Dog as a new breed in the Working Class. The June 1, 1937, issue of *American Kennel Club Registrations* carried the listings of the first two Bernese Mountain Dogs ever registered in this country, Mr. Shadow's Fridy v. Haslenbach (A-156, 753), and Quell v. Tiergarten (A-156, 752).

The name selected for the breed in America, *Bernese Mountain Dog*, reflects the precedent set in England, and is not a literal translation of Berner Sennenhund. The standard that the AKC accepted for the breed in 1937 was derived from the Standard then used in Switzerland.

The breed was slow to gain a foothold in its adopted home. Mr. Shadow's pair produced two litters, but no dogs were registered during World War II, when all importing stopped. After the war, Mr. Shadow's dogs produced three more litters. A few additional fanciers imported dogs from Switzerland, but even into the early 1960s, it was difficult to obtain information on the breed in this country. By 1962, owners in far-flung reaches of America worked together to promote the breed. Still, showing Bernese was a lonely business in those days! By 1966, the breed had made enough headway for owners and breeders to communicate more and more. The next step came in 1968, when formation of the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America led the way to improving communications between fanciers and promoting the breed. There are now over 700 members in the Club, and 1,502 Bernese Mountain Dogs (320 Litters) were registered by the AKC in 1992.

OWNING A BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG

If you are prepared to give your heart and share your life with a dog, perhaps you have earned the right to have a Bernese Mountain Dog! There are many good reasons for wanting to have one, but it should not be thought that these dogs are for everyone. Their large size must be considered. They require exercise in keeping with their strength and activity. They are not hard headed but have sensitive natures that must be treated with patience and kindness. They are relatively slow maturing dogs, with a long active, often boisterous, puppyhood. The Swiss Farmers' saying about the breed, *"Three years a young dog, three years a good dog, three years an old dog,"* is very appropriate.

FINDING THE RIGHT PUPPY

After studying the background, heritage, and characteristics of the breed, it is wise to see some Bernese Mountain Dogs *"in person."* Once the decision has been made that this is indeed the breed for you, contact should be made with reliable breeders.

Ideally, visits should be arranged with the breeder to see the litter from which your puppy will come and to meet the puppy's dam, and if you are lucky — the puppy's sire. This ideal cannot always be met, due to the distances sometimes involved in finding a Bernese Moun-

tain Dog. However, try to establish good relations with the breeder by telephone, if not in person, and mutually satisfactory arrangements for purchase of a puppy may be found. Be sure to discuss health concerns, especially those that have inherited components. Hip dysplasia, orthopedic elbow problems, cancer, and various allergic conditions should be mentioned. In return, a conscientious breeder should be asking the prospective puppy owner questions. *Is the family suitable for dogs? What is the work schedule of the family members? Are they experienced with raising puppies? Is there a fenced area available for the dog's exercise?* These and other concerns should be aired before a purchase is final.

A reliable breeder will provide information on care and feeding and early training. Do not be surprised if breeders differ somewhat on these matters, for there are nearly as many *"right ways"* as there are reliable breeders! All records on inoculations, worming, and health care should accompany the puppy. A four-generation pedigree and AKC registration papers must also be provided.

RAISING THE PUPPY

Feeding instructions for your puppy should have been provided by the breeder. A high quality dog food is frequently the base for your puppy's diet. Above all, a Bernese puppy should not be allowed to become fat, as excess weight puts too much stress on developing joints.

A puppy should have ample opportunity to exercise, but on its own terms. It should not be taken on long walks or forced to accompany a jogger. Moderation is the word for puppy exercise. It may play very hard, but it will rest when tired, not when its person tells it to do so. Bernese puppies should not be allowed to climb up and down long flights of stairs, for this puts too much stress on developing joints in the front and hind legs, shoulders, and hips.

It is important to establish good relations with a veterinarian with whom you and your puppy are comfortable. Regular veterinary examinations, inoculations, and discussion of the health of your Bernese are important parts of its development.

A puppy should learn that grooming is a regular and pleasant part of life. Bernese Mountain Dogs are perfectly natural in appearance,

requiring no tail docking or ear cropping. Combing and brushing are all that is needed to maintain the coat, which requires no trimming or stripping. Daily care of the coat keeps the puppy in tip-top condition and is continued through the life of the dog. Trimming the nails requires a bit of practice on the part of the owner, but once mastered, it too should be a regular part of grooming.

Training is vital to the mental development of your puppy, as well as to the acceptability of your pet in society. Training should begin at home, where limits are set on acceptable behavior. For more formalized training, your local kennel club can probably recommend kindergarten, puppy, and adult classes, where the growing Bernese will have a good chance to learn socializing with other dogs, an important part of growing up.

THE MATURE DOG

Once puppy days are over, you and your Bernese Mountain Dog can settle down to enjoy one another. Regular exercise is vital for both of you. Regular veterinary care will continue throughout the life of the dog.

The grooming that began when the dog was a puppy should be continued. Most dogs do shed and the Bernese Mountain Dog is no exception, so a little extra work may be required during shedding season. Extra care must be taken if you live where fleas and ticks are a problem — the coat must be parted to examine the skin and make sure that none of these pesky parasites are bothering the dog.

As might be expected of dogs that originated in a cool climate, Bernese Mountain Dogs are weather-hardy dogs. It seldom becomes too cold for them, and snow makes them very happy. On the other hand, hot weather does bother these stocky black dogs, and extra care must be taken to assure that they have a cool, shady place during the summer months.

You *can* teach an old dog new tricks, and your Bernese will learn throughout life. You may want to continue training classes after the dog matures, or simply keep your dog happy by using commands when playing or exercising with it.

THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG CLUB OF AMERICA AND ITS REGIONAL CLUBS

You may find, as you and your Bernese Mountain Dog grow together, that you want to establish relations with other Bernese Mountain Dog fanciers. The Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America (BMDCA) and its regional clubs are the organizations that provide you with this opportunity.

The BMDCA was founded by a handful of fanciers in 1968. It grew slowly at first, having 33 members in 1968 and not growing to over 100 members until 1971. Now, with a membership of over 700, the Club is well established and active in protecting and promoting the best interests of the breed. A member club of the AKC, the BMDCA holds a National Specialty show each year in different parts of the country. It produces a monthly publication and sponsors educational and other activities centered on the breed.

Objectives of the club, as stated in its Constitution are: **a.)** *to do all possible to bring the natural qualities of the Bernese Mountain Dog (Berner Sennenhund) to perfection;* **b).** *to encourage the organization of independent local Bernese Mountain Dog Specialty Clubs where sufficient fanciers of the breed exist to meet AKC requirements;* **c).** *to urge members and breeders to accept the standard of the breed as approved by the AKC as the only standard of excellence by which Bernese Mountain Dogs shall be judged;* **d).** *to protect and advance the interests of the breed and encourage sportsmanlike competition at dog shows. This includes the encouragement of active participation in dog shows; and,* **e).** *to conduct sanctioned matches, and specialty shows and obedience trials under the AKC rules.* If you are

interested in these objectives, you could contribute to the well being of the breed by becoming a member of the BMDCA.

In at least eighteen centers of concentration of Bernese Mountain Dogs across the country, regional Bernese Mountain Dog clubs are flourishing. All of these clubs provide important activities centered on Bernese Mountain Dogs. A Regional Club Council under the umbrella of the BMDCA coordinates these distinct groups. Hikes, seminars, study of the standard, social events for dogs and people, any and all activities related to the well being of the dogs come within the domain of regional clubs.

THE STANDARD OF THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG

The currently applicable standard of the Bernese Mountain Dog was adopted by the American Kennel Club on March 28, 1990.

GENERAL APPEARANCE: The Bernese Mountain Dog is a striking, tri-colored large dog. He is sturdy and balanced. He is intelligent, strong and agile enough to do the draft and droving work for which he was used in the mountainous regions of his origin. Dogs appear masculine, while bitches are distinctly feminine.

SIZE, PROPORTION, SUBSTANCE: Measured at the withers, dogs are 25 to 27 1/2 inches; bitches are 23 to 26 inches. Though appearing square, Bernese Mountain Dogs are slightly longer in body than they are tall. Sturdy bone is of great importance. The body is full.

HEAD: Expression is intelligent, animated and gentle. The eyes are dark brown and slightly oval in shape with close fitting eyelids. Inverted or everted eyelids are serious faults. Blue eye color is a disqualification. The ears are medium sized, set high, triangular in shape, gently rounded at the tip, and hang close to the head when in repose. When the Bernese Mountain Dog is alert, the ears are brought forward and raised at the base; the top of the ear is level with the top of the skull. The skull is flat on top and broad, with a slight furrow and a well defined, but not exaggerated stop. The muzzle is strong and straight. The nose is always black. The lips are clean and, as the Bernese Mountain Dog is a dry-mouthed breed, the flews are only slightly developed. The teeth meet in a scissors bite. An overshot or undershot bite is a serious fault. Dentition is complete.

NECK, TOPLINE, BODY: The neck is strong, muscular and of medium length. The topline is level from the withers to the croup. The chest is deep and capacious with well-sprung, but not barrel-shaped, ribs and brisket reaching at least to the elbows. The back is broad and firm. The loin is strong. The croup is broad and smoothly rounded to the tail insertion. The tail is bushy. It should be carried low when in repose. An upward swirl is permissible when the dog is alert, but the tail may never curl or be carried over the back. The bones in the tail should feel straight and should reach to the hock joint or below. A kink in the tail is a fault.

FOREQUARTERS: The shoulders are moderately laid back, flat-lying, well muscled and never loose. The legs are straight and strong and the elbows are well under the shoulder when the dog is standing. The pasterns slope very slightly, but are never weak. Dewclaws may be removed. The feet are round and compact with well-arched toes.

HINDQUARTERS: The thighs are broad, strong and muscular. The stifles are moderately bent and taper smoothly into the hocks. The hocks are well let down and straight as viewed from the rear. Dewclaws should be removed. Feet are compact and turn neither in nor out.

COAT: The coat is thick, moderately long and slightly wavy or straight. It has a bright and natural sheen. Extremely curly or extremely dull-looking coats are undesirable. The Bernese Mountain Dog is shown in natural coat and undue trimming is to be discouraged.

COLOR AND MARKINGS: The Bernese Mountain Dog is tri-colored. The ground color is jet black. The markings are rich rust and clear white. Symmetry of markings is desired. Rust appears over each eye, on the cheeks reaching to at least the corner of the mouth, on each side of the chest, on all four legs, and under the tail. There is a white blaze and muzzle band. A white marking on the chest typically forms an inverted cross. The tip of the tail is white. White on the feet is desired but must not extend higher than the pasterns. Markings other than described are to be faulted in direct relationship to the extent of the deviation. White legs or a white collar are serious

faults. Any ground color other than black is a disqualification.

GAIT: The natural working gait of the Bernese Mountain Dog is a slow trot. However, in keeping with his use in draft and droving work he is capable of speed and agility. There is good reach in front. Powerful drive from the rear is transmitted through a level back. There is no wasted action. Front and rear legs on each side follow through in the same plane. At increased speed, legs tend to converge toward the center line.

TEMPERAMENT: The temperament is self-confident, alert, and good-natured, never sharp or shy. The Bernese Mountain Dog should stand steady, though may remain aloof to the attentions of strangers.

DISQUALIFICATIONS: Blue eye color. Any ground color other than black.

For further information, contact
BMDCA Public Relations
Ruth Reynolds
5265 E. Fort Road
Greenwood, FL 32442

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